



Hegel and his students

## Hegel's Introduction to the Encyclopaedia

Hegel's "Encyclopaedia" is the collection of his printed lectures, begun relatively early in his career and enlarged and reorganised as time went on. This "[Introduction to the Encyclopaedia](#)" (download linked below) is dated 1830, one year before Hegel's death in the cholera epidemic of 1831.

The [Contents](#) of the Encyclopaedia is grouped into **Preliminary - Logic - Nature – Spirit**.

"Logic" in these Contents is divided into **Logic Defined – Being – Essence – Notion**.

There is a list of [Hegel's Works](#) on Marxists Internet Archive. Clearly, Hegel's works can be organised and presented in different ways. Let us not be in too much haste to grab at it all.

Hegel himself is ultra-cautious. His Introduction to the Encyclopaedia begins with repeated strictures against people taking anything for granted. Hegel does not want people to try looking for short cuts. He does not want to be misunderstood, or misrepresented. Unfortunately, Hegel turns out (mercifully for him, after his death) to have become one of the most badly misrepresented philosophers in history. We will look at some of the false “Myths and Legends” that surround Hegel’s work like devilish sentries, in the next part of this course.

In the last passage of the “Introduction to the Encyclopaedia”, **§18**, Hegel says:

*“As the whole science, and only the whole, can exhibit what the Idea or system of reason is, it is impossible to give in a preliminary way a general impression of a philosophy. Nor can a division of philosophy into its parts be intelligible, except in connection with the system. A preliminary division, like the limited conception from which it comes, can only be an anticipation.”*

In the beginning, **§1**, he writes:

*“We can assume nothing and assert nothing dogmatically; nor can we accept the assertions and assumptions of others. And yet we must make a beginning: and a beginning, as primary and underived, makes an assumption, or rather is an assumption. It seems as if it were impossible to make a beginning at all.”*

In **§16**, Hegel even manages to discount the entire Encyclopaedia, vast as it is, thus:

*“In the form of an Encyclopaedia, the science has no room for a detailed exposition of particulars, and must be limited to setting forth the commencement of the special sciences and the notions of cardinal importance in them.”*

All of this is to say: Wait. I will show you. Don't even anticipate. Be patient.

Of course, this is at the very moment when he is presenting an introduction to a collection of his lectures, which any student is bound to take as a summary of his work. Students should and must seek out such summaries, lists of contents and short versions, so that they can begin to conceive of the outline of the whole work, and get some idea of what its conclusions are intended to be.

But indeed, Hegel is a good example of one whose message is new and different and which must therefore struggle uphill against peoples' frequent desire to be told only what they already know, and against their resentment at being pushed towards relinquishing their long-held prejudices. Hegel's weariness of a lifetime of such uphill struggles comes through when he writes, at the end of **§3**:

*“One consequence of this weakness is that authors, preachers, and orators are found most intelligible, when*

*they speak of things which their readers or hearers already know by rote - things which the latter are conversant with, and which require no explanation.”*

In §6, Hegel discusses, from this point of view, one of his most famous sayings, often written (in English): “All that is rational is real, and all that is real is rational”. This is a useful first mention of this very characteristic Hegelism from Hegel’s own pen, and set within some pages of his prose which are not impossible to read.

Hence, this Introduction will serve well enough as our first taste of Hegel’s own writing.

- **Image:** Hegel and his students
- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Introduction to the Encyclopaedia, Hegel, 1830](#).
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).